DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 468 TM 014 348

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TITLE How American Educational Policy and Practices Impact the Language and Culture of an American Pacific Island.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; *College Students; *Cultural Influences; Cultural Interrelationships; *Educational Policy; English (Second Language); Higher Education; High School Graduates; High Schools; Language of Instruction; Language Role; *Language Usage; Modernization; Samoan; *Samoan Americans; Social Influences; Sociocultural Patterns; *Student Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *American Samoa

ABSTRACT

The impact of the western educational model and the use of English on the language and traditional behaviors of young people in American Samoa was studied. Results from a 1973 study were compared with results collected in 1987 using the same instrument to measure changes in language and culture-related behaviors. A survey of nearly 190 American Samoans graduating seniors was conducted in May 1973 to determine the extent to which the English language had penetrated into Samoan society and to determine the impact of western education on the culture, language, and traditional behaviors of American Samoan youth. Subjects for the current study were 173 students attending American Samoa Community College. Data were collected using the background information sheet developed for the initial survey. The general design of the self-report instrument was adopted from the Acculturation Scales of D. Gold (1966). Comparing 1973 and 1987 results indicated a general shift to increased English usage and a decrease in the amount of Samoan language used in nearly all interpersonal situations. Samoan did continue to be the primary language used with parents, but was no longer the primary language with siblings. In 1987 students had shifted their preferences toward western styles of dress, an overt characteristic of acculturation. These findings reflect the need to determine the educational and cultural priorities of the American Samoan population. Three tables contain study data. (SLD)

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How American Educational Policy and Practices Impact the Language and Culture of an American Pacific Island

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A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, April, 1988.

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How American Educational Policy and Practices Impact the Language and Culture of an American Pacific Island

American educational practices are assimilative in design and outcome. The cultural assimilation of diverse populations of immigrants has been a major historical pre-occupation of American schools. In the case of the Pacific islands, American educational policy has been very much the implicit acting out of basic western educational values, attitudes and traditions in non-western cultural and linguistic settings.

An ongoing controversial educational issue in many of the United States Pacific island nations is the role of English in the educational system. English was introduced by the Americans upon possession of the islands and used as the language of instruction. During the 1970's federal bilingual legislation impacted the educational systems in the Pacific islands by providing Title VII funding for bilingual programs. Numerous bilingual projects and curriculum development efforts in the vernaculars were implemented. However, to this day, consensus had not been reached among Pacific islanders regarding the relative importance of the indigenous language and culture with respect to English and western culture. Despite the bilingual educational efforts of the 1970's and 80's, education has been a major social component and an instrument of change impacting Pacific island languages and cultures. The adoption of western educational models, such as the one implemented in United States Pacific islands has resulted in encouraging and promoting modern ideas and values.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of the western educational model and the use of English on the language and traditional behaviors of young people in a specific United States Pacific island, American Samoa. The paper compares the results of a study conducted in 1973 in American Samoa with data collected in 1987 using the same instrument to measure changes in language and cultural related behaviors. Baldauf (1973) concluded that the western educational system has affected student attitudes and behavior and that many students have been forced to choose between western and traditional Samoan values and language. One question posed by Baldauf was whether the growing emphasis in the 1970's on bilingual/ bicultural approaches to education would be a major force in helping retain the Samoan language and culture. This paper reexamines the language use and behavior patterns of American Samoan youth fourteen years later, and discusses language policy and practices in the schools.

Background

Since the arrival of the first missionary teachers in American Samoa in 1828, there have been various pressures for social and linguistic change. The American Samoa public schools, established during the Navy period beginning in 1902, stressed attitudes and values (i.e. individualism, competition, and evaluation) which were alien to Samoan culture. Between 1921 and 1951 the United States operated with two basic assumptions when applying educational policies to American Samoan schools. First, there was the belief that United States educational practices could be transplanted to American Samoa with very few disadvantages, a belief that reflected colonial educational thinking. There was also the assumption that English was to be the language of instruction (Reid, 1941).

However, another side of American educational practice was not to be assimilated in the sense stated above. Samoans became increasingly concerned that their children were being drawn away from their traditional culture by not being taught Samoan language or Samoan customs (Sanchez, 1955). American Samoans insisted that western values and English not be learned at the expense of Samoan language and culture. A shift from the Americanization goal to a bicultural goal was reflected in the following statement of DOE policy:

> Inherent in this commitment (respect for the uniqueness of each individual and his potential, and the commitment to the concept and practice of individualized instruction) is the obligation to preserve the cultural heritage and foster the economic well being of American Samoa, while at the same time, prepare each individual for a personally satisfying and socially useful life wherever he chooses to live (Think Children, 1974).

The above statement reflects the desire to develop bicultural individuals who will maintain and preserve the Samoan culture. To this end, American Samoa was moving to become a bilingual society in the 1970's. English was the official language of the schools, but there were bilingual programs as well. English was the major vehicle for communication in government and business, but Samoan language continued to dominate in the homes, churches, villages and in most close interpersonal situations (Baldauf, 1984). The goal was for each student to become bilingual in Samoan and English and have respect for Samoan traditions and culture.

A survey of nearly 190 American Samoan graduating seniors was conducted in May 1973 to determine the extent to which the English language had penetrated into Samoan society, and to determine the impact of western education on the culture, language and traditional behaviors of American Samoan youth (Baldauf, 1973). The current study replicates Baldauf's study to determine what, if any, changes have taken place with respect to language usage and behavioral changes over the past 14 years.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 173 students attending American Samoa Community College, the only institution of higher education in American Samoa. A student was classified as Samoan if he was born in American or Western Samoa, or was of Samoan parentage and residing in American Samoa. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents were born in American Samoa, 14% in Western Samoa and the remainder (9%) were born in Hawaii or on the United States mainland. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were female and 39% male. The mean age of the students was 20 years. By sampling community college students, the population was similar to that surveyed by Baldauf. The variables of age, background, and exposure to the educational setting were partially controlled in both studies by using the selected student populations.

Instrument

The data for this study were collected over a six month period using the Background Information Sheet (BIS) developed by the American Samoa Department of Education's Testing Office (Baldauf, 1973). See Appendix A for the complete instrument. The general design for the self report instrument was adopted from Dolores Gold's Acculturation Scales (1966, 142-145). Questions included in the BIS survey were developed in collaboration with Samoans knowledgeable in Samoan language and culture and the questions were presented in Samoan and English. Data gathered included information about students, their home and family, and the languages and dress they used in different situations. Behaviors indicating resistance to or adaption to overt acculturation were measured by examining language behaviors with immediate and extended family members, language behavior with community members, usage in practical situations, and types of dress worn in traditional and western oriented situations.

Results

Comparing the 1973 results with the 1987 results indicated a gradual shift to increased English usage and a decrease in the amount of Samoan language currently being used in certain situations. The results provided some interesting comparisons and suggested intriguing differences in the interpersonal and situational language use of American Samoan youth over the past 14 years.

The 1973 results indicated that Samoan was the dominant language in American Samoa, particularly in interpersonal situations. The 1987 results indicated a decrease in Samoan use in all interpersonal situations, except with the pastor. As Table 1 indicates, Samoan

language was mostly or always used with parents, 83% of the time in 1973 compared with 74% in 1987. Samoan was used with aunts and uncles 65% of the time in 1973 compared to 46% in 1987, and brothers and sisters 56% of the time in 1973 compared to 41% in 1987. A particularly interesting result was that the language patterns used with the pastor were almost identical in the 1973 and the 1987 samples.

Insert Table 1

Language spoken in the community indicated a slight drop in Samoan language usage in the case of best friends and classmates. Students in the 1973 survey reported using Samoan with best friends 30% of the time compared with 29% of the time in 1987, with classmates 13% of the time compared to 9% of the time in 1987. Students reported using Samoan and English with best friends 52% of the time in 1973 compared to 48% of the time, and with classmates 60% compared to 58% of the time. Perhaps more significant than the decrease in Samoan language usage is the difference in the amount of English used by students in the 1987 sample. Results show an increased use of English in the personal interactions with brothers and sisters, friends and classmates. In 1973 English was used 8% of the time with brothers and sisters compared to 14% of the time in 1987, 17% of the time with best friends in 1973 compared to 33% of the time in 1987. English was used 27% of the time with classmates in 1973 compared to 33% of the time in 1987. The high percentage of English used with teachers went up only slightly, from 67% in 1973 to 70% in 1987. Language use patterns with storekeepers indicated a slight increase in English from 5% in 1973 to 17% in 1987, and a drop in Samoan from 33% in 1973 to 24% in 1987. The results point to an increase in English usage, in particular in the personal interactions with extended family members, friends and classmates.

The responses of the students to a variety of other situations provided interesting comparisons. (See Table 2 for complete results). Student responses to cognitive behaviors such as reading, writing, homework and thinking indicated a strong preference for English over Samoan: 29% preferred using English when thinking compared to 15% in 1973, writing (47%) compared to 34%, and homework (74%) compared to 62%. Students indicated that when listening to the radio, English was used 43% in 1987 compared to 20% in 1973. Students indicated a decrease in the use of Samoan when teasing and joking (40%) for 1973 compared to 29% of the time in 1987, thinking (36%) compared to 21%. The results differed only slightly in the 2 samples on the praying variable.

Insert Table 2

The results of the studies indicate that language use is generally situational. That is, the use of English or Samoan is dictated by the individuals being spoken to and/or the situation itself. According to recent results, Samoan language is used the majority of the time with parents and the pastor. Family and church-related situations are traditionally-oriented and are closely tied to the Samoan culture. Further support for this notion can be seen by examining the following variables: language spoken with pastor and language used when praying. The language use patterns were almost identical for the two studies, showing very little change over the past 14 years. The use of Samoan decreased to below 50% in the case of aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters. This result suggests that language use with family members, other than parents has shifted to greater English usage. Samoan was spoken a small percentage of the time with classmates and teachers, suggesting that school is considered an English-oriented situation influenced by western models. The language used with teachers has remained the same showing only a slight shift towards more English.

Results from the inventory indicating the students' preference for either traditional or western style dress showed a shift towards western style of dress since the 1973 results. However, like the language results, the preferred dress was situational. Samoan style clothing was generally preferred in situations reflecting "fa'a Samoa", the Samoan way, i.e. in the home, village or in church. In both studies approximately 40% of students indicated a preference for Samoan style clothing at home. In the village, 40% of the students preferred Samoan clothing compared to 52% in the 1973 study. Thirty-four percent of the respondents of the current study preferred Samoan style clothing for church compared with 56% of the 1973 respondents. Results indicated that western style dress was preferred at school, 56% compared to 32%, and downtown (Fagatoga) 59% compared to 40%. Clearly the overt characteristic of acculturation, preferred style of clothing, has shifted to western style of dress.

Insert Table 3

Discussion

The current survey results indicating an increased emphasis on English support the contention that western style education, and the increased emphasis on English in the schools and the media have influenced the language preference and the preferred style of dress of Samoan students. It should be noted that the increased English language use cannot entirely be attributed to western education and educational television. The growth of television and videocassette recorders has also had some impact on bringing about changes in language and dress.

The results suggest that most young people are clearly bilingual, that is, quite comfortable using English and Samoan. However, there are certain interactions and situations in which one language is preferred, and considered more appropriate than another.

Since English is a major tool needed to participate in the outside world, it is not surprising that English proficiency is a high priority in American Samoa. The present language policy in the schools is English-only and represents a shift away from the bilingual programs implemented in the 1970's and 1980's. Samoan curriculum materials developed through these bilingual programs are no longer in use in the classroom. All instructional textbooks are produced on the U.S. mainland and are used from first grade on. The practice of instructing students in Samoan in the early grades and gradually shifting to English in the upper grades has been abandoned for English-only.

The question posed by Baldauf in 1973 was whether the emphasis on bilingual programs could serve as a force to help retain the use of Samoan and prevent the demise of the language. The results of the current study suggest that there is indeed a shift towards increased English language use, but that the use of Samoan has been maintained in traditionally oriented situations. There is also evidence to indicate that language use and patterns of dress are situational, that is, the students are comfortable code switching depending upon the situation and the individuals involved. The fact that there has been some erosion of the Samoan language and a shift towards English with friends, peers and siblings suggests a trend towards greater English use and increased facility with the English language, particularly among the young people.

The dilemma faced in American Samoa of creating bilingual/ bicultural individuals without destroying the Samoan language and culture is not a new one. Another United States possession, Guam, has been dealing with the problem for many years. From the beginning of U.S. control it has been American policy to use the English language wherever possible, and to discourage, even prohibit, the use of Chamorro (Day, 1983). The outcome with respect to the role of the vernacular in Guam is not so favorable as American Samoa. Guamanian children have been encouraged to use English in the schools and home. In fact, the belief held by many in Guam and American Samoa is that one must forego study in the native language to learn English effectively. In Guam, the vernacular is spoken by most of the mature generation, but school age children speak little or no Chamorro. Many fear that Chamorro will have the same fate as the Hawaiian language in Hawaii, that is, become almost an extinct language.

In contrast to the situation in Guam, American Samoa school age children still speak Samoan outside of the classroom. At the present time there does not appear to be the immediate possibility that Samoan will lose its position as the main language of the islands. However, there is evidence to indicate that there has been gradual slippage of the use of Samoan in favor of English. One factor that operates as an advantage for American Samoa and has contributed to the continual use of the Samoan language is that nearby Western Samoa serves to provide a cultural transfusion of traditional values and language use.

What the future holds is uncertain. One could predict that there will be a continued increased usage of English particularly as the youth in this study mature and have children. It is clear that primary and secondary students in American Samoa schools are exposed to more English than the students in this study. The current English-only policy and use of English texts could have a dramatic impact on English usage in the future. These issues could have consequences on the language and culture of American Samoan similar to what has occurred in Guam.

It is important that American Samoans address the language issue and the extent to which school society and village society need to be complementary in the socialization process. This question may appear remote from the issue of English language development, yet it is inextricably intertwined with the issue of acculturation. There remains great pride among Samoans in their culture, yet there is lip service rather than substantial evidence that the schools actually support and enhance Samoan culture. It will take great social sensitivity and a strong sense of priorities on the part of policy makers to satisfy the educational expectations of the American Samoans, while at the same time maintain the language and culture.

American Samoans have recognized the advantages of using English for communication and access to economic opportunities, but they must also examine the possibility that an overemphasis on English, and its exclusive use in the schools suggests a hidden agenda that may pose a threat to the Samoan language and culture. There is an impending need to determine the cultural and educational priorities in American Samoa to avoid the conflict between the actual practice of the system and stated policy, and to prevent the demise of the Samoan language.

Table 1. Interpersonal Language Use

Language Used with	Percentage Using					
	Always/Mostly Samoan		Samoan/English		Always/Mostly English	
	1987	1973	1987	1973	1987	1973
Parents	74	83	18	12	7	4
Brother/Sister	41	56	44	36	14	8
Friend	29	30	48	52	33	17
Classmates	9	13	54	60	37	27
Teachers	3	3	25	28	70	67
Aunts/Uncles	46	65	44	27	10	9
Pastor	76	75	16	16	6	6
Storekeepers	24	33	59	61	17	5

(Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.)

Table 2. Situational Language Use

Language Used In	Percentage Using					
	Always/Mostly Samoan		Samoan/English		Always/Mostly English	
	1987	1973	1987	1973	1987	1973
Writing	3	5	49	57	47	34
Teasing/Joking	29	40	53	51	18	7
Praying	55	57	28	29	15	11
Homework	0	8	24	29	74	62
Watching TV	5	7	27	35	67	56
Listen to Radio	4	10	52	64	43	20
Thinking	21	36	49	51	29	15

(Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.)

Table 3. Samoan-Western Dress Scale

Dress Worn at	Percentage Using: Always/Mostly Samoan		Either Style		Almost/Mostly Western	
	1987	1973	1987	1973	1987	1973
School	5	23	39	42	56	32
Church	34	56	28	24	38	18
Home	39	40	47	47	13	11
Village	40	52	43	36	16	10
Fagatogo	5	12	36	46	59	40

(Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.)

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